

Testimony on Helicopter Traffic/Noise in the Airspace Above New York City  
By Bryan Clampitt

I live in the Chelsea neighborhood of Manhattan, but the chaotic increase in helicopter traffic and the noise produced by roaring “chopper blades” affects all of New York City. On nice weather days it has become impossible to have any windows open in my apartment and even with closed windows the low roar of “chopper blades” penetrates into my living space. This cacophony of noise is coming mostly from tour helicopters, but also commuting, NYPD and news-gathering helicopters that fill the skies over NYC, and which I’ve noticed has increased exponentially since Covid-19 quarantine was declared by Governor Cuomo. This is on top of NYPD helicopters that regularly hover over my building since 9/11, doing absolutely nothing to deter terrorism or crime.

If there were any F.A.A. airspace rules concerning NYC, especially pertaining to any terrorist threat after 9/11, the many 311 complaints concerning helicopter noise I’ve filed seem to fall on deaf ears or the delete key on the receiving end. The current head of the F.A.A. seems to have been put in place by the last administration for the same reason as heads of any other: to dismantle any existing regulations the F.A.A. is supposed to enforce.

The constant roar over my building particularly, has made quarantine that much more difficult, with a helicopter hovering, flying too low, or just passing over every 4 minutes on nice days, creating an extremely nerve-racking roar, making it very nearly impossible to concentrate on quiet activities I do at home, especially reading any kind of literature. When I close all the windows in my apartment, the low roar penetrates the glass; there’s no getting away from the racket. My level of stress increases dramatically on high traffic days (including hovering NYPD helicopters), turning a nice evening into a nightmare, pushing me toward anger, helplessness and suicidal thoughts, when normally, I would be perfectly content.

Helicopter tour companies, especially from what I’ve read, flyNYON, located in Kearny, N.J., have been aggressively promoting and selling as many NYC fly-over tours as they can, in order to make as much profit as they can, while this era of lax, or no regulation goes on. I’ve written many letters, to my representatives, to New Jersey’s Senators Corey Booker and Bob Menendez, and to Governor Phil Murphy, all of which seem to go nowhere.

In this abdication-of-regulations anarchy, I’ve also looked at local organizers, one of whom had a group on Nextdoor.com, where we tried different tactics, including letter writing, filling out as many 311 helicopter noise complaints as possible, and signing a petition and following the progress of the organization Stop The Chop. Over the last year, it seems to me there are no adults in charge, no rules, regulations or considerations aside from helicopter companies booking as many flights as they can, to make as much money as they can, as long as they can get away with this.

My name is Bruce Norris. I'm a playwright and I've lived in Chelsea for the past eleven years, after living in Brooklyn the previous ten. I'm writing this to express some of the misery inflicted on midtown residents due to the constant, pointless overflight of our neighborhood by tourist helicopter traffic.

I love living in New York - it's the only place I ever wanted to live. And I love it despite the city's unavoidable frustrations — the crowded sidewalks and subways, the dirt, the smell of summer... even the noise, some of which is unavoidable when millions of people are crowded onto one small island and its surrounding neighborhoods. We put up with a lot: Car alarms, subway noise, neighbors' parties (or domestic fights), etc, all of which can be justified and endured from time to time. But when I moved into my Chelsea apartment one of its few attractive qualities — facing, as it does, *away* from the street — was its relative quiet. That was, until very recently (especially within the last year) when the helicopter flights began.

Now, no one has a problem with the emergency medical flights or police business — but these tourist flights serve no conceivable purpose for the city. Companies like FlyNYON operate out of New Jersey, so they bring no revenue to our local economy. They claim to promote tourism, but their privileged clients (with money to spend, clearly) never experience any real aspect of New York — shows, restaurants, shops, sports — all they see are our rooftops. Worse, they contaminate our skies with AVGAS exhaust, spewing lead into the air we breathe — the equivalent of having diesel trucks flying over our heads. And worst of all, they denigrate our quality of life with their ceaseless, inescapable noise. This has escalated to the point where now, as soon as one flight is done circling midtown (Chelsea included) another takes its place, so that the din of their propellers continues uninterrupted, all day long, every day.

Our lives in New York are hard enough without this gratuitous additional assault on our health and our senses. I urge you to take strong action to regulate these businesses, or better yet, ban them from our skies altogether.

Thanks,  
Bruce Norris  
(Chelsea, NYC)